

VZCZCXRO6462
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHNR #1422 1631143
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 111143Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6038
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 6002
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 2064
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0109
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2835
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 5290

UNCLAS NAIROBI 001422

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E

E.O.12958: N /A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAIR](#) [KE](#)

SUBJECT: ODM MINISTER AND ASSISTANT MINISTER KILLED IN
RIFT VALLEY PLANE CRASH

REF: NAIROBI 1384

¶1. On June 10 at approximately 1400, Minister of Roads Kipkalya Kones and Assistant Minister for Home Affairs in the Office of the Vice-President Lorna Laboso, were killed when their light aircraft crashed into the side of a hill near Narok (Rift Valley Province) during bad weather. Two other people, the pilot and a bodyguard, were also killed. Mr. Kones and Ms. Laboso were both members of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) representing neighboring constituencies in the Rift Valley near Ainemoi (Bomet and Sotik respectively).

¶2. The Rift Valley Provincial Police Officer and the Director of the Air Accident Investigation Branch are investigating the accident. There are no indications of foul play at this time, and initial readouts from contacts at Wilson airport point to an accident based on poor pilot judgement, as poor weather had caused other small airlines to cancel similar flights. Despite this, local media reported that crowds in Kones' home district had blocked a major road in protest after rumors emerged that the government (or possibly former President Daniel Arap Moi) were behind the crash. We have alerted election observers in Ainamoi to be on heightened alert for any civil unrest.

¶3. The death of Mr. Kones and Ms. Laboso bring the number of ODM MPs who have died since the December 2007 General Election to four. At the time of the crash, the two cabinet members were on their way to oversee ODM observation efforts for the June 11 by-election to fill the seat left vacant by the death of Ainemoi MP David Kimutai Too, who was shot on January 31 (reftel). This is the third plane crash in five years involving the death of MPs. In 2006, six MPs lost their lives when their plane crashed into a hill while approaching Marsabit, upper Eastern Province. In 2003, the Minister of Labor was killed when his plane (also carrying three other cabinet ministers) crashed shortly after takeoff in Busia, Western Province.
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